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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: SOME ISLAMIC CLERICS OBJECT TO
POTUS VISIT

Ref: Abuja 3296

1. "Daily Trust," a Northern-oriented independent newspaper based in Abuja, December 11 published a page four article reporting the call by some Muslim clerics in far-northern Katsina that the Government of Nigeria cancel President Bush's visit if reports of an upcoming visit are true.

2. Begin Text:

You are not welcome, Muslim clerics tell Bush

From Abdu Labaran, in Katsina

As the rumours of the impending visit of the American President, George W. Bush, continue to make the rounds, a groundswell of opposition to the visit is already building up with Muslim clerics in Katsina State telling the American number one citizen to stay away from Nigeria as he is not welcome.

Uztaz Khalid Yunus and Ustaz AbdulBasir Unguwar Kawo Kankara, two firebrand clerics of the Izalatul Bid'a wa Ikamatus Sunna (Izala) Movement, expressed their opposition to the visit in separate interviews with Daily Trust, asserting that the American president's visit to Nigeria will not benefit the country in any way.

The clerics maintained that the visit "far from doing any good to Nigerians will only further expose us to more hardship as our meager resources will be committed to hosting the visitor and his entourage, in addition to the visit sending the wrong signal to the Islamic and peace-loving communities that Nigeria not only supports but endorses America's gang up policy against weaker nations and its global anti-Islam agenda."

Ustaz Khalid Yunus, who only last week Friday led a moving prayer (Al-Qunut) that lasted for up to 20 minutes after the Juma'at prayer, viewed the visit as a bad omen to Nigeria, expressing the believe (sic) that nothing will bring the American president to Nigeria if there is nothing in the visit for his country.

"As far as American leadership is concerned, there is only one interest and one world view; which is America," he stated, saying that to expect President Bush to come to Nigeria in the interest of Nigeria is simply foolhardy as, according to him, the American government does not think much of our country given the treatment meted out to Nigerians visiting the US.

Calling on the Federal Government to call off the visit if it is true, he asserted that the visit will not benefit Nigeria since the several visits to America by President Obasanjo have not helped Nigeria or Nigerians.

Ustaz AbdulBasir, who also led in a special prayer (Salatul Haja) on Saturday at Kofar Kaura Mosque where the US, Britain and Israel were the target of the prayer and special lecture, condemned the American president's proposed visit to Nigeria, describing the motive behind the visit as suspect.

He alleged that the motive of President Bush's visit to Nigeria may not be unconnected with his government's desire to drum up support for its aggression against Saddam's Iraq and Israel's aggression against Palestinians and their government as well as America's thirst for Nigeria's crude oil.

Vowing to intensify prayers in mosques, he called on Nigerians of all religions and the National Assembly to prevail on President Obasanjo not to welcome the American president and his entourage.

END TEXT.

13. Katsina is home to a particularly conservative element of Muslim society and a small but growing number of militant fundamentalists. Its border with Niger permits easy interaction with extremists based in that country (see also reftel). The attitudes expressed in the article will find some resonance among like-minded opponents of secular government generally and the West (especially the U.S.) particularly. However, a solid majority of Nigerian Muslims would welcome a visit by President Bush. The Embassy will continue to monitor media and other sources for echoes of this article.

JETER